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ABSTRACT

The alleged characteristic drop in grade point average (GPA) of transfer students and the subsequent rise in GPA was investigated in this study. No statistically significant difference was found in first term junior year GPA between junior college transfers and native Florida State University students after the variance accounted for by the Florida Twelfth Grade Test was removed. Also the subsequent rise in GPAs of junior college transfer students was found not to be significantly different from that of native students when observed over a 2-year period and when students who dropped out were excluded from both groups. (Author/AL)

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"TRANSFER SHOCK" OR "TRANSFER ECSTASY"?

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Abstract

The alleged characteristic drop in grade point average of transfer students (transfer shock) and the subsequent rise (recovery) in grade point average was investigated by this study.

The study found no significant difference in junior college transfers' first term grade point average and native Florida State University juniors' first term junior year grade point average after the variance accounted for by Florida Twelfth Grade Test was removed. Also, the subsequent rise of junior college transfers' grade point averages was not found to be significantly different from the rise in native juniors' grade point averages over a two year period when students who dropped out were excluded from both groups.

"TRANSFER SHOCK" OR "TRANSFER ECSTASY"?

Dr. John M. Nickens

Studies of performance of junior college transfer students in the senior institutions have revealed phenomena which have been referred to as "transfer shock" and "recovery" (Hills, 1965). These phenomena respectively are: 1) drop in grade point averages (GPA) after transfer from the junior colleges to senior institutions and 2) a rise (recovery) of GPA's over subsequent terms.

"Transfer shock" has become a term widely used, and presently connotes to many academicians a cause and effect relationship between transfer and drop in GPA. It is unfortunate that academicians would attach this connotation to transfer since research has not shown that such a relationship exists. Moreover, the existance of the relationship connotated by "transfer shock" should be questionable for the following reasons: 1) Students from some junior colleges attain the same GPA the first term in the senior institution that they earned in the junior college (Hills, 1965). 2) Transfer students from some junior colleges attain an even higher GPA in senior institutions than in the junior colleges (Hills, 1965). 3) There is no known evidence that students who transfer from a senior college to a junior college experience a drop in GPA. On the contrary, many students who have done poorly in senior institutions have transferred to junior colleges and improved their GPA's (Wharton, 1964).

In the absence of evidence indicating that "transfer shock" is caused by transfer, it seems inappropriate to assume that such a relationship exists. In fact, if it can be shown that native students manifest the same "recovery"

phenomena, and that the drop in transfers' GPA's can be plausibly accounted for by an academic variable, then it follows that "transfer shock" is a misnomer, and should be replaced with more appropriate terminology. But, how can these phenomena be explained more plausibly?

Perhaps such an explanation that would explain both the drop in GPA on transfer and the subsequent GPA recovery could be structured from environmental differences in presses on grading practices (McQuire, 1960). Stern's research (1965) suggested that differences in values and objectives of institutions resulted in different grading practices. Foster (1969) looked at grading practices by partialing SCAT from the correlations between grades and criteria measures and found that several variables studied related differently to teacher assigned grades for different schools. These results were also supported by transfer student data compiled by this researcher at Florida State University. Specifically, significant differences were not found in the means of junior colleges' GPA's among twenty Florida junior colleges for transfer students at FSU (Table 1) but t tests indicated that some Florida Twelfth Grade Test (FTGT) scores means for transfer students grouped by these colleges were significantly different (.01 level) (see Table 2). A consequence of this and Aiken's (1963) finding that faculty grading practices were based on relative class curves is that transfers from Junior College X should be expected to attain a lower mean GPA than they attained in the junior college when their test score mean is lower than their classes' test score mean at the senior institution (assuming, of course, that a significant relationship exists between test scores and averages).

Tables 1 and 2 about here

Another factor which must be considered when comparing the GPA means attained in the junior college with the GPA means attained in the senior

institution is the effect of admission standards on the range of the junior college GPA's. Since transfer students typically must have had a 2.00 or higher junior college average to be admitted to the senior institution, their junior college GPA mean was biased upward. An estimate from the data in Table 1 was that 16 percent of the lower part of the grade distributions were less than 2.00 and thus excluded from computation in the junior college means. Therefore, the mean GPA of transfers should be expected to be lower for the first term in the senior institution due to regression toward the actual junior college mean. Should someone desire to coin a new term such as "transfer ecstasy", he could use this same statistical pitfall. Simply compare the final junior college GPA's of transferred students with that of their classes' previous term junior college GPA. Although this expected difference may be slight, the average difference for twelve colleges on which Dr. Hills coined the term "transfer shock" was only three-tenths of a grade point.

In addition to pointing out the fallacy of attributing "transfer shock" to adjustment problems resulting from transfer, the above conditions point out the difficulty in designing an experiment to detect any possible variance in GPA's explainable by transfer. Before undertaking such a task, one should determine if junior native and first-term junior transfer GPA's are different and if so, if the difference can be accounted for by test score differences. However, the phenomenon of rising GPA's must still be considered even if adjusted averages are not significantly different.

Perhaps it could be argued that "recovery" is caused in part by attrition of "poorer" students. Since transfer students typically have lower test score means than native students, the attrition rate should be higher for transfer students than for native students. Thus the rise in junior college transfer

students' GPA's should be expected to be higher than the rise in GPA of native students because of attrition of poor students. Therefore, one must avoid confounding "recovery" with attrition by using data on students who persevered to graduation. This is reasonable since one could safely assume that some transfer students who allegedly experience shock persevered to graduation. Therefore, the following hypothesis which was investigated by this study, if not rejected under appropriate tests, should be sufficient for divorcing the connotations of "recovery" from transfer. "The rise in GPA's for transfer students who persevered to graduation were not significantly different from the rise in GPA of native students who also persevered to graduation."

Method

The sample on which the data were collected for this study consisted of 926 baccalaureate degree candidates at FSU in the spring and summer quarters of 1968. The data collected included "type of student" (native, or transfer after reaching junior standing); junior college cumulative GPA, if type was transfer; GPA for the first-term of the junior year; the GPA's for the students' two terms preceding the final term at FSU (the data were compiled during the students' final term and thus final term grades were not included); major; and FTGT. These data were keypunched into cards, and a computer program subtracted the initial GPA from the final GPA and punched the values of all the variables into another set of cards. The Biomedical Computer Programs (1968) were used to perform the data analysis.

Results

The results of the analysis of covariance of native students' first-term junior year GPA and transfer students' first-term FSU GPA with FTGT as the

covariate are presented in Table 3. Note that the difference in FTGT means of the natives and transfers of this large sample (924) was highly significant (P = .01). Also, their GPA's were significantly different as expected. However, after adjusting for FTGT differences, the GPA's were not significantly different even at the .05 level.

The regression coefficient of .0016 was highly significant (P = .01), although small, and varied only by .0002 when the regression coefficient was computed for transfers only.

Table 3 about here

The analysis of variance of GPA rises of native and transfer students is given in Table 4. Even though 445 transfers and 481 natives were included in the samples analyzed, the GPA rises for the two groups were not found to be significantly different even at the .05 level.

Table 4 about here

An analysis of variance of GPA rises of native and transfer students by area of major is given in Table 5. It is interesting to note that the GPA rises in four of the six areas studied were not significantly different, but two of the areas, education and business, had significant F's at the .01 level. However, the GPA rise was higher in education for natives and higher in business for transfers.

Table 5 about here

Discussion

Research should raise new questions in the quest for answers to the old questions. This study is no exception in that one would appropriately ask why

the native students showed more "recovery" in education while the transfers showed more "recovery" in business. However, it is beyond the purpose of this study to research this question at this time. Rather, it is to be noted that major areas, as in this case, may exhibit phenomena that negate in a more general research design.

The results of this study suggested in two cases that the major at FSU may have related to GPA rise. However, there was no evidence to indicate that transfer students' GPA's rose more than that of the natives. Furthermore, no significant difference was found between transfer students' first term FSU GPA and native students' first-term junior year GPA at the .05 level when the variability accounted for by FTGT was removed by analysis of covariance. One should not infer that difference did not exist between transfer students' cumulative junior college GPA mean and their first-term FSU GPA mean. However, this would imply that transfer students at FSU were performing as well as they should be expected to perform had they come to FSU as freshmen.

Conclusions

These results indicated that the phenomena on which the term "transfer shock" and "recovery" were coined were manifested by transfer students at FSU. However, these pheomena were adequately accounted for in this study by academic variables through application of appropriate statistical methods.

It was concluded that GPA's of transfer students included in this study manifested no evidence of problems unique to transferring. Thus "transfer shock" may be more plausibly accounted for by regression toward the mean and by differences in grading practices among institutions than maladjustment of transfer students. "Recovery" was shown not to be unique to transfer students and thus does not constitute a valid argument in support of "transfer shock."

Table 1

Comparison of GPA Means of Random Samples of
Transfer Students to FSU Stratified by Community College

Junior College	Sample Size	Jr. College GPA Mean	Standard Deviation
1	10	2.591	.4036
2	10	2.684	.3909
3	10	2.629	.3798
4	10	2.647	.4054
5	10	2.740	.4265
6	10	2.776	.4804
7	10	2.687	.4999
8	10	2.599	.3121
9	10	2.574	.4431
10	10	2.783	.3818
11	10	2.367	.3783
12	10	2.480	.3632
13	10	2.753	.4482
14	10	2.875	.5140
15	10	2.524	.2793
16	10	2.751	.5028
17	10	2.758	.6514
18	10	2.868	.6703
19	10	2.542	.4856
20	10	2.585	.3146

Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F Ratio
Between Groups	3.2561	19	.1714	.8556*
Within Groups	36.0529	180	.2003	
Total	39.3090	199		

*Not significant at .05 level.

Table 2

FTGT Score Means of FSU Degree Candidates
of Spring and Summer 1968

Previous College Code	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	28	312	108
2	28	313	99
3	36	361	80
4	43	339	96
5	24	317	90
6	20	295	109
7	20	323	92
8	13	330	115
9	7	328	142
10	16	321	99
11	58	301	89
12	16	309	114
13	4	323	144
14	19	339	68
15	4	233	120
16	5	339	61
17	6	279	117
18	16	344	106
19	5	305	63
20	20	325	81
21	3	233	99
FSU	602	382	79

Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between Groups	1088989,8165	21	51856.6666	6.9737*
Within Groups	7220225,4400	971	7435.8655	

*Significant at the .01 level due to the large mean of FSU. T-test show other significant differences at the .05 level between several pair comparisons.

Table 3

Comparison of GPA's of All Transfers and All Natives
for First Term of Junior Year at FSU
(Analysis of Covariance)

Source of Variation	Degrees Freedom	Sums of Squares and Products			Deviation about Regression		
		XX	XY	YY	Y*Y*	DF	Mean SQ Y*Y*
Means	1	890086	2294	6			
Within	923	7206198	11338	266	249	922	.2695
Total	924	8096284	13632	272	249	923	
Difference for Testing Among Adjusted Means					.7988	1	.7988

Regression Coefficients		Mean	F-Ratio	DF
Means	.0026	X (FTGT)	114.01 **	(1, 923)
Within	.0016	Y (GPA)	20.49 **	(1, 923)
Total	.0017	Y (Adj. GPA)	2.96	(1, 922)
		B (Reg. Coef.)	66.18 **	(1, 922)

*Adjusted.

**Significant at the .01 level.

Table 4

Comparison of Transfer and Native GPA Rise at FSU

Treatment Group	Transfer	Native
Sample Size	445	481
GPA Rise	.22356	.25699
Standard Deviation	.48937	.52697

Analysis of Variance

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F-Ratio
Between Groups	.2583	1	.2583	.9961
Within Groups	239.6295	924	.2593	
Total	239.8879	925		

Table 5

Comparison of GPA Rise for Natives
and Transfers by Area of Study at FSU

Area	Means and Standard Deviation								F-Ratios for GPA Rises
	Transfers				Natives				
	Sample Size	Initial GPA	Final GPA	GPA Rise	Sample Size	Initial GPA	Final GPA	GPA Rise	
Business	93	2.44 (.493)	2.60 (.439)	.158 (.468)	161	2.79 (.471)	3.16 (.459)	.366 (.487)	11.1 *
Education	103	2.70 (.415)	3.07 (.439)	.369 (.413)	94	2.73 (.566)	2.90 (.588)	.197 (.497)	7.03 *
Social Science	26	2.63 (.414)	2.82 (.595)	.188 (.457)	41	2.73 (.661)	3.05 (.629)	.219 (.471)	.068
Natural Science	58	2.47 (.601)	2.77 (.548)	.295 (.517)	46	2.57 (.609)	2.73 (.556)	.198 (.663)	.703
Social Welfare	44	2.63 (.514)	2.86 (.611)	.235 (.611)	115	2.82 (.512)	3.02 (.631)	.235 (.534)	.000
Others	121	2.58 (.573)	2.70 (.548)	.119 (.496)	24	2.77 (.550)	2.93 (.520)	.045 (.575)	.421

*Significant at the .01 level.

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